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ABSTRACT

An allegorical scenario in which five witnesses (English Language, Christian Religion, Science, Music, and Modern Society) dramatize the charge of irrelevance which Modern Society makes against Latin Language. After hearing the charges of the prosecution and the defense state its case, a verdict which recognizes the impact of the legacy of Rome is issued by the Judge. (RL)

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No. 458

# THE TRIAL OF LATIN LANGUAGE: A DRAMATIZATION

By Florence B. Handwright

## CHARACTERS

Judge
Defending Attorney
Prosecuting Attorney
Prisoner (Latin Language)
First Witness (English Language)
Second Witness (Christian Religion)
Third Witness (Science)
Fourth Witness (Music)
Fifth Witness (Modern Society)

Setting: A Court Scene

JUDGE: Order in the court! Who is the prisoner and what is the charge?

OFFICER: Your Honor, Latin Language is the prisoner, and she is charged with the crime of being old-fashioned, of keeping our attention riveted on the past and, furthermore, of monopolizing the foremost place in education at the present time.

DEFENDING ATTORNEY: Your Honor, I shall examine these witnesses. First Witness, what is your name? Tell us of your acquaintance with the prisoner.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE: English Language is my name. I am indebted to Latin for my very life. She really brought me up. She originated 52.5% of the words of my language. Many of them really belonged to her, but she lent them to me. My doctors, my lawyers, my nurses, my pharmacists are all dependent upon her. Many of my boys and my girls have Latin names. In the writings of the great English masters, great deference is paid to her. Surely Latin Language illuminates the English Language.

DEFENDING ATTORNEY: Second Witness, what is your name? We would like to hear about your acquaintance with the prisoner.

RELIGION: My name is Christian Religion. I have known Latin for nearly 2000 years, and, like English Language, I am greatly indebted to her and dependent upon her. My earliest oratories, hymns, and prayers were in Latin. The Bible was used in its Latin form for centuries before being translated into English. Latin Language has been my greatest friend. Pray, let no harm come to her!

DEFENDING ATTORNEY: Third Witness, your name? What evidence have you in regard to this prisoner?

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SCIENCE: My name is Science. While I am the most lively and progressive phase of modern life, yet, strange as it may seem, Latin Language and I are great friends. Whenever I have a new invention or discovery, I go to Latin Language; for she ever stands ready to the tongues of my scientists. Certain advanced scientific books, for which there is not a wide market in any one country, are printed in Latin. Thus they can be sold in all countries and be understood by educated people. In one of my branches, known as Chemistry, the very elements of which various chemicals are composed are known by their Latin names, and the abbreviations of these names make up the alphabet of Chemistry.

In a similar way, the scientific names of the plants and animals are Latin. Through the use of Latin names in all the countries of the world, scientists are sure to be understood, for the truly official name of every plant and animal is its Latin name.

DEFENDING ATTORNEY: Fourth Witness, your name? Are you acquainted with the prisoner?

MUSIC: My name is Music. I have known Latin Language for generations. She is one of my best friends. It is true that my musical terms are in Italian, but here too the honor must be hers, for Italian is the only modern Latin now spoken in Italy. I always advise my musicians to look up the Latin sources of my technical terms and to let their Latin help them in their music.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY: Your Honor, we shall now hear the opposing witness. What is your name? What do you know about the prisoner?

MODERN SOCIETY: My name is Modern Society. I have known the prisoner for a long while, but we don't speak when we meet. She is always forcing her way into nearly every branch of learning. I have seen her in Mathematics, in Science, in English, in Music, in Religion -- everywhere. She is forever reminding us of the past, for which we care nothing. We are for the present. That is all we are interested in. What do we care about what is past and gone? And I, for one, would like to see Latin Language imprisoned.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY: Your Honor, you have heard the testimony of Modern Society. She speaks the truth. These other witnesses are friends of the prisoner and in a great measure dependent upon her. The charges against her are grave and should be given serious consideration. The Latin Language is a dead language. She is the same today as she was 2000 years ago. She is not a spoken language. Then why continue teaching her in our schools? I consider it a waste of time. Modern languages are growing languages; they live. In view of our close intercourse with the nations of the world, it becomes an economic question rather than one of sentimental choice. We should not keep our minds riveted on the past but should look to the future. I say drop the

teaching of Latin Language from our schools. Teach the modern languages. We are up-to-date in other fields. Then why not in this?

DEFENDING ATTORNEY: Your Honor, you have heard the testimony of these witnesses. What think you? Shall we be so base as to deny the honor due to this esteemed and revered citizen? What evil has she done? Is it a crime to have laid the foundation of the English language, of which more than half the words are of Latin origin? Is it to her discredit to have contributed to Religion and to Science? Are we so blind as not to have perceived her contribution to Law? Even our own United States has profited by a legacy from her; for the coins of our money have the words E PLURIBUS UNUM engraved upon them.

Antiquity has left modern generations priceless treasures of thought which pertain to the various activities of daily life. Language, Art, Literature, Science, Religion, Government, and ideals of conduct -- none of these is our very own. Latin Language was the organ which acquired, assimilated, and passed on to posterity the greater part of this ancient learning. Latin Language was throughout the Middle Ages the tongue used for instruction in the Universities of Europe. It was also the language of diplomacy. We conclude, Your Honor, with the assertion that Latin Language illuminates the English Language. Can we in the face of this evidence and our duty to those who come after us, listen to the charges made against this time-honored, patient, long-suffering mother of Modern Learning?

JUDGE: Has the prisoner anything to say?

LATIN LANGUAGE: I am accused of being old-fashioned and of never changing. This is the strongest defense I have. The very fact that my character does not change has made it possible to interpret all branches of learning from antiquity to the present time in the light of truth. Science has recognized this unchanging quality in me and has caused many of her books to be written in Latin. It is not conceit in me to say that I am the link between antiquity and modern life. I have preserved for all time the legacy of Rome. I stand unsurpassed, and I have a belief that I am destined to instruct and influence the world as long as it endures.

JUDGE: I am convinced that a great injustice has been done to this noble member of society by these witnesses for the prosecution. Rather should we bow with reverence to her great service down the ages. Instead of causing us to look backward, she, like a good mother, has given us a foundation, enabling us to meet the demands of the present day. For you, Latin Language, I have only respect and reverence, since you have preserved and handed down to us our great legacy of Rome. I therefore dismiss the case.